

DOCKET ITEM 07-01
Maximum Height Requirement for Utilities in Residential Zones

ISSUE:

- Should zoning rules allow for additional height for essential public facilities, such as reservoirs and water towers, within residential zones?
- Is the proposed 75-foot height maximum sufficient for public facilities needs while still providing opportunity for buffering of residential properties?

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve a code modification to allow additional height for water towers. This amendment is proposed as a note in the development standards table allowing the height of a publicly owned water system structure to be increased up to a maximum height of seventy-five feet (75') to the highest point of the building.

BACKGROUND:

Current zoning treats public facilities the same as all other structures in a zone with respect to height, setback, and lot coverage. Height in Renton's R-1, R-4, and R-8 zones is two stories and 30 feet. Water towers do not meet these standard heights. Public facilities are defined in the Renton Municipal Code as: *streets, roads, highways, sidewalks, street lighting systems, traffic signals, domestic water system; storm and sanitary sewer systems, park and recreation facilities, schools, public buildings.*

Most of these public facilities can appropriately meet height requirements because, where structures are required (e.g. parks buildings, schools and public buildings), the function of the building does not necessitate greater height. However, domestic water system facilities are an exception to that rule. The height and bulk is needed for storage capacity and for water flow.

In the past, variances have been requested and granted to height standards for public facilities. However, the variance is not the correct zoning tool to use in this instance because variances are property specific, and findings are required for hardship based on the physical constraints of the parcel. For a typical structure in the zone, these findings would be based on evidence that the size, shape or environmental constraints of a site prevent reasonable use of the parcel. However, water towers, by function, require height greater than 35 feet. The need for additional height is not created by any physical constraint of the site, but by the function of the use. Sites proposed for water system facilities typically are larger than the minimum lot size allowed in the zone and are selected because they do not have physical constraints. The facilities typically do not require the entire 35 percent lot coverage allowed for other structures in the zone, and land is available in the larger setback for buffering adjacent uses. The water tower use requires a Hearing Examiner Conditional Use Permit as a large utility and requires a public hearing with an opportunity for public comment on site planning and buffering issues.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE:

Implementation of a height exception for essential public facilities in residential zones meets Land Use Element **Objective LU-R:** *Locate and plan for public facilities in ways that benefit a broad range of potential public uses*. It also meets **Policy LU-79:** *Guide and modify development of essential public facilities to meet Comprehensive Plan policies and to mitigate impacts and costs to the City*. A height exception complies with the Comprehensive Plan because the facility could not be located or planned for in a residential area with a conventional height.

CONCLUSION:

Allowing additional height of a maximum of 75 feet allows these facilities to occur in neighborhoods where they are needed.